

Affinity Foundation Pet Abandonment and Adoption Study 2013. Interpretation of the results.



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How many dogs and cats were taken in by animal shelters?

Key data:

- Last year, 141,835 pets were taken in.
 - 108.303 dogs.
 - 33.532 cats.
- Based on the above data, we can estimate the rate of abandonment and/or loss of animals as being 23 dogs and 7 cats picked up per 10,000 inhabitants.



Our interpretation:

- Dogs and cats being abandoned and lost is the main problem affecting the well-being of pets in Spain ¹
- The figures for 2013 do not differ significantly from previous years. Once again, abandonment is confirmed as being a structural problem which requires greater intervention and cooperation between all agents involved in its prevention, both public and private.

Abandonment is one of the most important problems affecting the well-being of pets.

How many pets are actually abandoned?

Key data:

- 20% of dogs and 4% of cats taken in by animal shelters and protection organisations were returned to their owners (Figures 1 and 2).
- Only 26% of dogs and 1.8% of cats who are taken into a shelter are correctly identified with a microchip (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Outcome for dogs who arrive in shelters or protection centres.

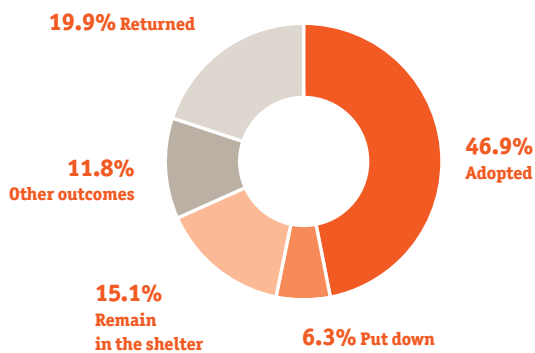


Figure 2. Outcome for cats who arrive in shelters or protection centres.

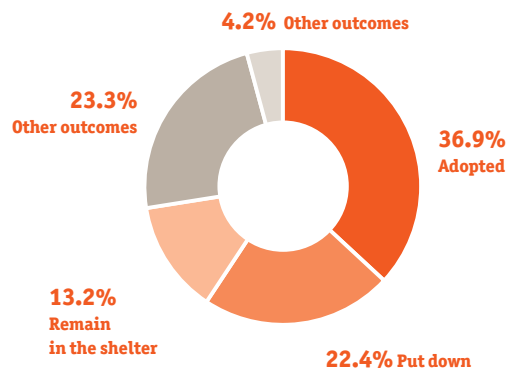
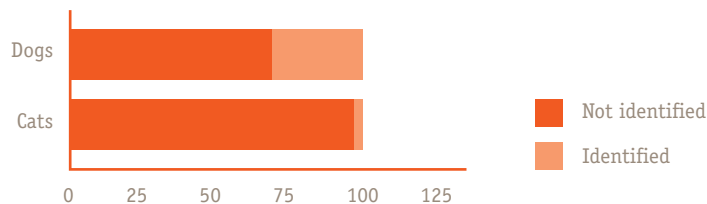


Figure 3. Percentages of identified dogs and cats that arrive in animal shelters.



Our interpretation:

- Some pets that are brought into a refuge are not really abandoned but have actually been lost. The key factor in returning a stray is being able to locate its owners.
- In order to succeed in this, it is essential for the pet to be easily identified by microchip.
 - In this regard, a recent study carried out in Spain, in a number of centres where animals are taken in, indicates that the proportion of identified dogs returned to their owners is three times the number of non-identified dogs².
- The number of cats returned to their owners is noticeably lower than that of dogs.
- This data may, on the one hand, reflect the lower number of cats identified as compared to dogs and, on the other hand, the arrival in animal shelters of many cats that are born and grow up on the streets.
- Identifying pets is definitely one of the main strategies for combatting pet abandonment and loss.

Microchip identification allows abandonment to be combatted and lost animals to be recovered.

Is it true that more animals are abandoned in summer?

Key data:

- The proportion of dogs picked up by animal protection organisations was 33% for each of the three 4-month periods of the year (Figure 4).
- The proportion of cats picked up by animal protection organisations in the three 4-month periods was 25%, 42% and 32% respectively (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of dogs picked up

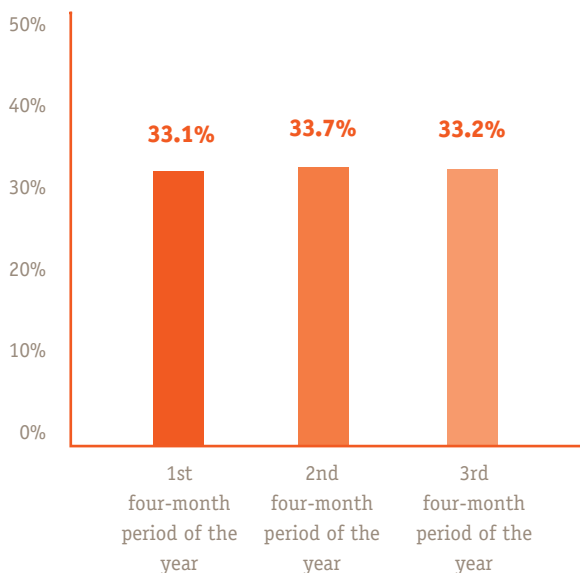
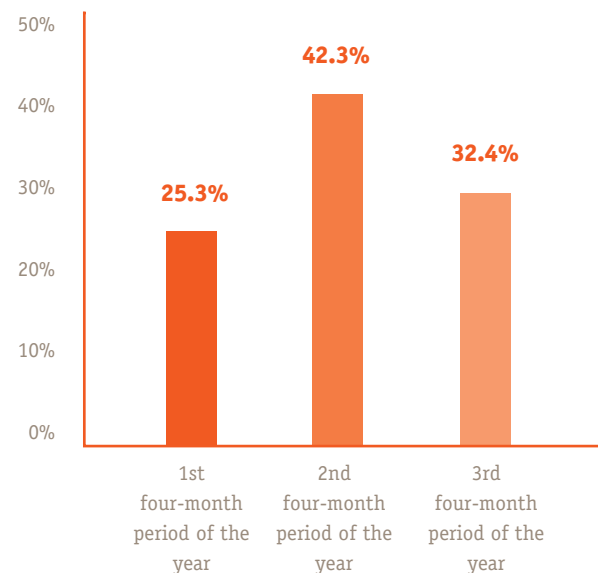


Figure 5. Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of cats picked up by animal protection organisations.



Our interpretation:

- Dogs are abandoned at the same rate at all times of the year. This figure contrasts with the very widespread opinion that dogs are abandoned particularly before the summer holidays.
- Most cats arrive in animal shelters in the second four months of the year. This is explained by the fact that cat reproduction is seasonal, and that one of the major reasons for pets being abandoned is precisely unwanted litters.
- Studies carried out on this subject indicate that most cat litters are unwanted by their owners³. This data shows how important sterilisation is in preventing pet abandonment.

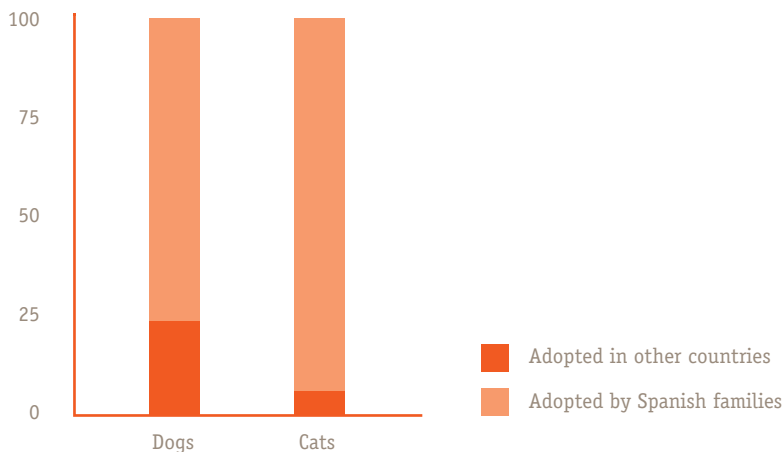
Sterilisation is a key strategy for preventing pet abandonment.

What happens to dogs and cats that arrive in animal shelters?

Key data:

- What happens to dogs?
 - As we have already shown, 20% of dogs are returned to their owners (Figure 1).
 - 47% are adopted.
 - Of these, 79% are adopted by Spanish families and 21% are taken abroad (Figure 6).
 - 15% remain in the shelter waiting for adoption and 6% are put down (Figure 1).
- What happens to cats?
 - As we have said, around 4% of cats are returned to their owners (Figure 2).
 - 37% are adopted.
 - 90% of all adoptions take place in Spain and 10% in other countries (Figure 6).
 - 13% remain in the shelter and up to 22% are put down (Figure 2).

Figure 6. Destinations of dog and cat adoptions from animal shelters and protection organisations in Spain.



Our interpretation

- Promoting adoption is one of the key strategies for reducing the population of abandoned animals. Some of the dogs and cats that arrive in shelters are adopted by families in other countries.
- This data suggests that Spain has a pet adoption deficit, not only because the number of abandoned animals is not offset by the number adopted, but also because some of these adoptions take place outside the country.
- If they are not adopted, pets are condemned to spending the rest of their days in a shelter or in many cases to being put down.

Adoption is key to reducing the abandoned dog and cat population.

What kind of animal is adopted?

Key data:

- 19% of dogs and 8% of cats abandoned are purebreds.
- Almost half of abandoned dogs are medium sized. (Figure 7)
- Some of the dogs and cats that arrive in shelters are puppies or kittens. (Figure 8)

Figure 7. Size of dogs arriving in animal shelters.

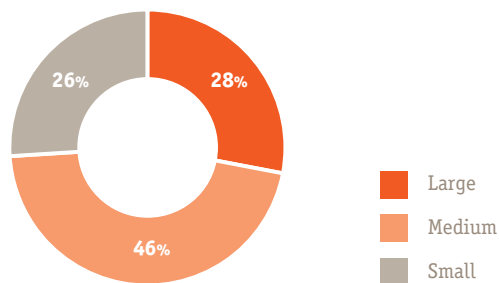
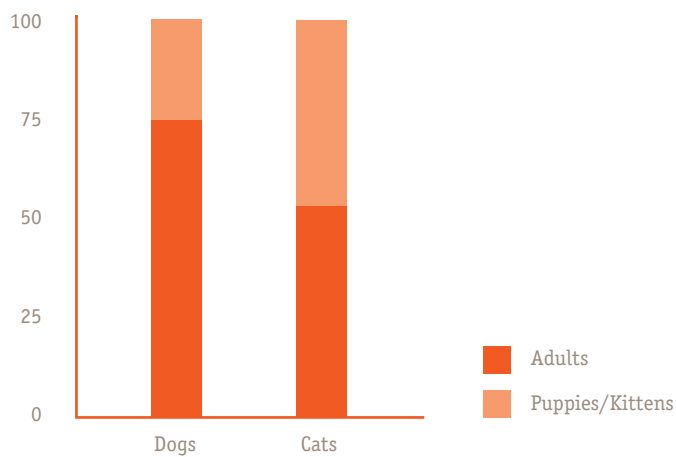


Figure 8. Percentage of puppies and kittens out of the total number of dogs and cats arriving in animal shelters.



Our interpretation

- Abandonment is a phenomenon that affects dogs and cats of all kinds, and is not therefore restricted to a particular age group or to specific breeds.

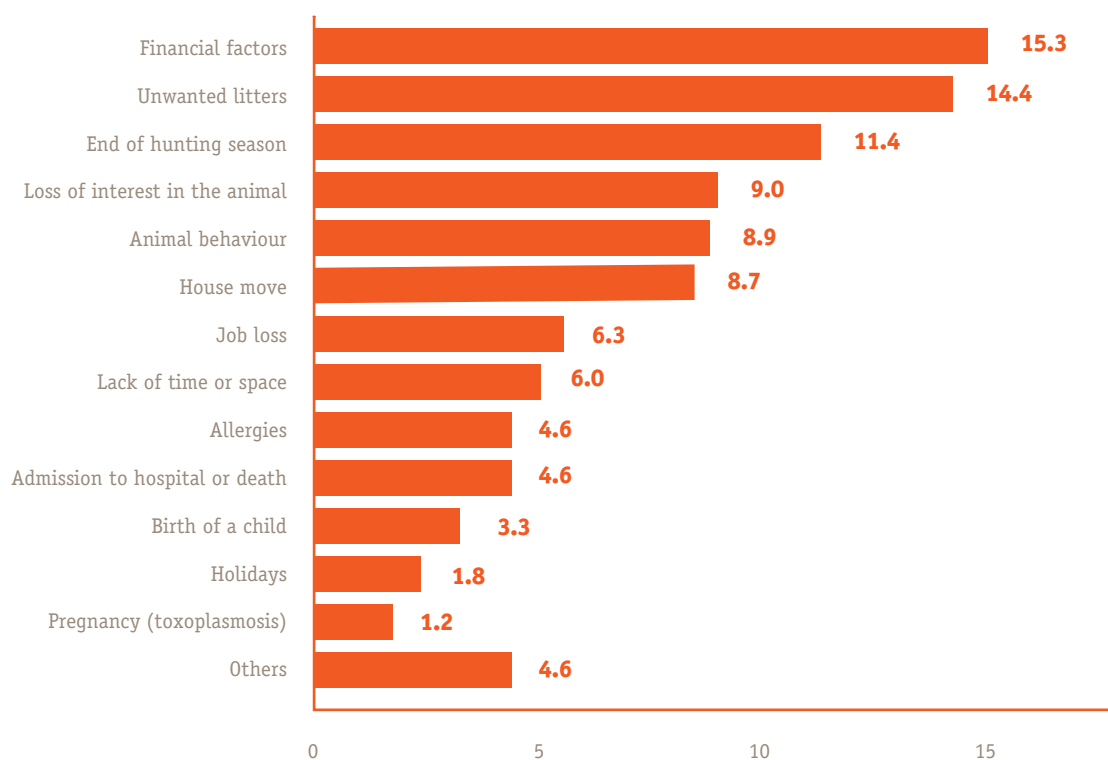
Animal shelters receive dogs and cats of any age and breed.

Why do some people abandon their pets?

Key data:

- The 5 main reasons why people abandon their pets are financial problems (15%), unwanted litters (14%), end of the hunting season (11%), loss of interest in the animal (9%) and animal behaviour (9%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Reasons for abandoning pets.



Our interpretation

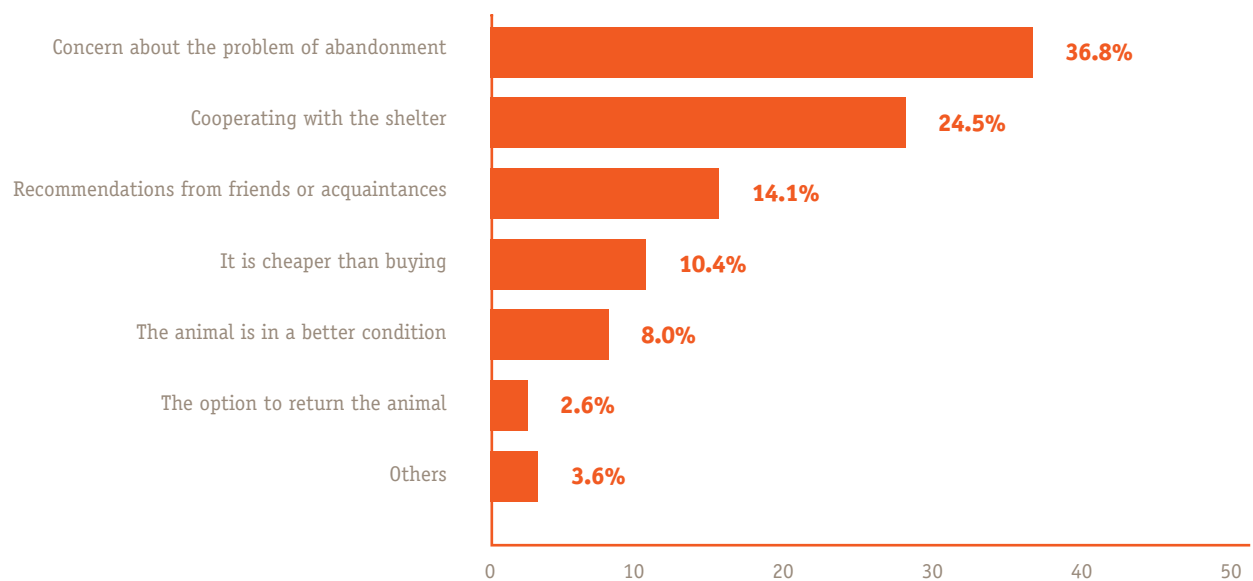
- Financial factors and unwanted litters are the two main reasons for abandonment. Beyond the potential impact of the economic crisis on the keeping of pets, both factors suggest that many abandonments could be avoided with proper planning by the owners.
- With regard to unwanted litters, it is important to remember the importance of sterilising pets as a strategy for reducing the population of abandoned animals. The idea that a pet has to reproduce at least once in its life for its well-being is not correct.
- The information on the reasons why pets are abandoned is given by people who personally take their pets to animal shelters. It is worth remembering, however, that the great majority of animals who arrive in shelters have been found on the street or brought in by people who are not their owners. Therefore, we still don't know the real reasons why so many pets are abandoned in our country.

Why do people decide to adopt a dog or a cat from an animal shelter?

Key data:

- The 3 most important reasons why people decide to adopt are the concern that many of them have about the problem of abandonment, their desire to work with the animal protection organisation and recommendations from friends or acquaintances.

Figure 10. Reasons people give for adopting a pet.



Our interpretation

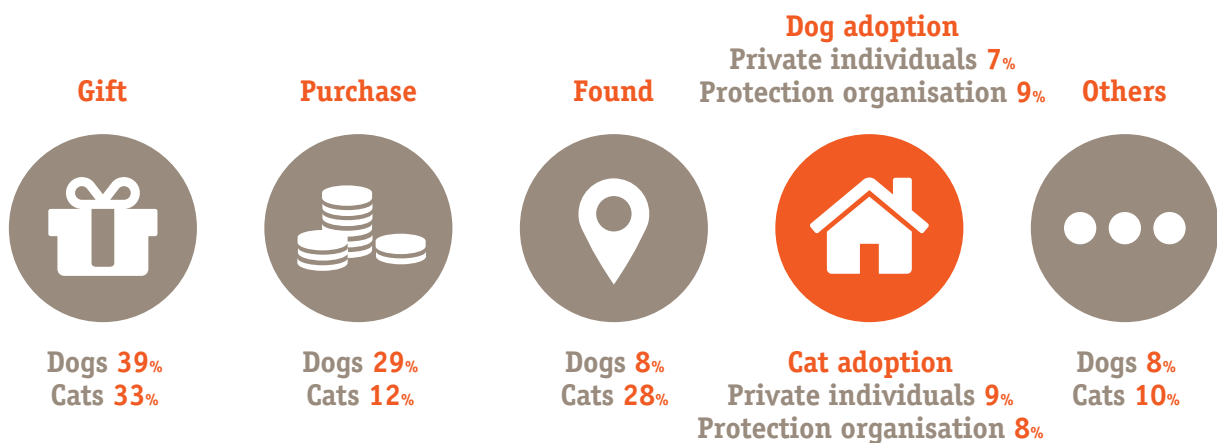
- Adoption is an alternative to buying a pet that benefits everyone: the family, the animal protection organisations and, of course, the dog or cat itself.

Is adoption a frequent option when acquiring a pet?

Key data:

- 9% of dog owners say they adopted their pet from a shelter or animal protection organisation (Figure 11).
- 8% of cat owners say they adopted their pet from a shelter or animal protection organisation (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Origin of dogs and cats in Spain.



Our interpretation

- Adoption is not yet the option chosen by the majority of people when acquiring a dog or cat.

Adoption should be promoted as a clear alternative when bringing a pet into the family.

Main conclusions

- Abandonment remains a major animal welfare issue in Spain.
- Sterilisation, identification and adoption are the 3 key strategies for preventing and minimising the impact of pet abandonment.
- Sterilisation and identification are part of a wider concept of responsible pet ownership, which includes the duties of responsibility that all owners assume in respect of their pet.
- Citizen participation is fundamental for combatting the problem of abandoned pets.

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